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RR RUEHGI RUEHRN RUEHROV  
DE RUEHKM #1389 2901308  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 161308Z OCT 08  
FM AMEMBASSY KAMPALA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0790  
INFO RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0746  
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE  
RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS KAMPALA 001389

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [UG](#)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN UGANDA: CARITAS DEFENDS ITS ROLE IN THE PEACE  
PROCESS

1. Summary: Catholic NGO Caritas Uganda answered Government of Uganda (GOU) critics in a published newspaper advertisement that explained the organization's role in providing food and supplies to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) under the auspices of the Juba Peace Process. Caritas felt it necessary to defend itself after the Ugandan Minister for Disaster Preparedness Tarsis Kabwegyere publicly admonished Caritas for providing food to the LRA. Donors no longer provide regular food deliveries to the LRA, but have agreed to supply limited amounts of food for combatants attending specific meetings called by the Mediator and Facilitator of the peace process. Nonetheless, the exchange illustrates the GOU's deep distrust of Caritas. End Summary.

2. On October 7, Caritas Uganda responded to Minister of Disaster Preparedness Tarsis Kabwegyere's public comments at an international conference on banning cluster munitions held in Kampala. Kabwegyere stated that Caritas should stop feeding the LRA rebels. The following is a verbatim transcript--including several minor inaccuracies and spelling and punctuation errors--of Caritas' response entitled "NGOS ASKED TO STOP FEEDING LRA CARITAS CLARIFIES ON THE MINISTER'S ALLEGATION."

3. BEGIN QUOTE. In the "New Vision" of September 30, 2008 page three, it was stated by the Honorable Minister for Disaster Preparedness, Professor Tarsis Kabwegyere that "Caritas should stop giving food to the rebels so that they get under pressure to sign the peace agreement. But as long as they continue to get supplies, they will see no reason of ending the rebellion. There is a moral question on why Kony continues to receive food. Whoever is sending food to the jungles is committing a mortal sin especially if they are Christians."

We would like to clarify this statement which is likely to mislead the public and the world which is already too anxious and waiting for that day of signing the Peace agreement. Caritas Uganda which is the Social Pastoral arm of the Catholic Church at the Uganda Episcopal Conference is not currently supplying food and medicine to the rebels. It is to be pointed out that the Uganda Government started negotiating for Peace with the rebels mediated by Lt. General Salva Kiir Mayadart (sic), the President of Southern Sudan in Juba in October 2006, Caritas Uganda was requested and mandated by the mediating team (CHMT) consisting of the Republic of Uganda, Southern Sudan Government, the rebels, a consortium of donors and UN representatives, to supply food and medicine with set guidelines to the rebels in the assembly area - Rikwangba in southern Sudan bordering Garamba forest in the Republic of Congo. As a result a Partnership Agreement for the support to the implementation of COHA (Cessation of Hostilities Agreement) between the GOU and LRA/M project was executed between Danida - HUGGO (Danida Human Rights and Good Governance Liaison Office) and Caritas Uganda. The supplies were checked and monitored regularly by the monitoring team in Juba until the date set for signing Peace Agreement April 2008. We are however grateful for the trust put in Caritas Uganda to carry out this noble assignment to end the conflict.

When the signing flopped, Caritas also ended its mandate. In compliance with the guidelines, Caritas contributed to the peace process by keeping the rebels out of rebel activities in search for

food. This was done to the satisfaction of the mediation team and the donors until the fixed date for signing the Peace Agreement. The Honorable Minister of Internal Affairs, Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda is and has been aware of all the steps that we have been engaged in. As a matter of fact we have been in constant consultations with him.

It is therefore surprising for Honorable Professor Kabwegyere to make such misleading and irresponsible statements of that kind. On the contrary, he should thank Caritas Uganda and the entire Catholic Church leadership for the peaceful contribution we have made in the peace process and also the spiritual and material help which the respective Churches have given to the suffering people in Northern Uganda. Signed, Msgr. Dr. Francis Ndamira, National Director, Caritas, Uganda. END QUOTE.

14. Comment: Post notes that Kampala-based donors, who previously funded Caritas' food deliveries through the Juba Initiative Fund to support the peace process, are acutely aware of the sensitivity of providing food to the LRA. The donors ended regular food deliveries after LRA leader Joseph Kony failed to show up for meetings to discuss the Final Peace Agreement in April and May. Since then, donors have agreed only to provide food for meetings called by the Mediator, Government of Southern Sudan Vice President Riek Machar, and the Facilitator, U.N. Special Envoy for LRA Affected Areas, Joachim Chissano. The donors have agreed that food supplies would be limited to feeding combatants at the venue for the duration of meetings only. Our position has been that we do not provide food to the LRA, but that other donors may do so for the duration of specific meetings in limited quantities. Despite Caritas' defense, the GOU continues to believe that LRA supporters in the diaspora use Caritas shipments to send contraband to the LRA. End Comment.  
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